

Build BABY Build

Let's “Table” The Research

*We Need Housing NOW. “Build BABY Build” is not just about building homes — it is about building opportunity, character, patriots, the economy, and a future for every generation. **This is how we build up America.***

Executive Summary

America's affordable housing shortage is not a knowledge problem. It is a supply problem. Yet every year, hundreds of millions of dollars move through federal agencies, state housing departments, city consultants, and private foundations to fund studies, data portals, needs assessments, research networks, and webinars about a problem that this same body of research has already diagnosed: not enough homes get built, fast enough, in the places people need them.

There are meetings after meetings, where so often no real solutions come out of them. And it gets stamped “tabled” for a later date.

This report totals the traceable federal and philanthropic spending on housing research and finds roughly \$198.75 million committed to studying the problem — before counting the thousands of individual local consultant contracts layered on top in nearly every U.S. city with a housing plan requirement. It documents a June 2026 GAO audit finding that HUD has not implemented a single priority recommendation on its own books since May 2025 — evidence the bottleneck isn't a lack of findings, but a lack of follow-through. It also examines a decade-long case study in regulatory gridlock — tiny houses on wheels, blocked three times in ten years in three code cycles despite current demand and willing builders and buyers — and closes with the other half of “Build Baby Build”: funding the trades and rebuilding shop class, since none of this gets built without hands to build it.

Bottom line: the diagnosis has been repeated for decades— restrictive zoning, slow permitting, and limited land drive costs. The bottleneck is political will and construction pace, not missing data.

The Money, In One Table

Below is the traceable spending on housing research and related dissemination activities, drawn from federal budget documents and public foundation grant records.

Source	Amount	Period	What It Bought
HUD PD&R — total appropriation	\$145,500,000	FY2025 (1 yr)	Research, studies, and technical assistance contracts on “housing and urban problems”
HUD PD&R — Core Research & Technology only	\$71,500,000	FY2025 (1 yr)	Housing data infrastructure, “knowledge management, dissemination, and outreach,” technical innovation

Source	Amount	Period	What It Bought
HUD Research & Technology account — proposed cut	–\$44,000,000 (–32%)	FY2026 vs. FY2025	HUD's own budget office concluding this share wasn't essential
MacArthur Foundation — “How Housing Matters” initiative	\$25,000,000	2008–2013 (5 yrs)	42 competitively awarded academic studies plus a research network
— of which, competitive research program	\$17,000,000	Same 5-yr window	34 individual research projects
MacArthur → Urban Land Institute	\$850,000	2014	\$500K research web portal; \$350K for one rental-housing conference
MacArthur — single grant round	\$2,800,000	2013 (1 round)	6 grants, part of the same initiative
MacArthur — single grant round	\$2,700,000	2012 (1 round)	5 grants on housing's effect on child well-being
MacArthur — single project grant	\$900,000	3 yrs	One study on housing's role in child development
Local — typical city needs assessment / plan update	Tens of thousands / city / cycle	Recurring, ~every 5 yrs	Consultant-run cost-burden and demand studies, repeated city-by-city nationwide

Running federal + philanthropic total shown above: roughly **\$198.75 million** spent on housing research, data portals, and one conference — before counting the thousands of individual local consultant contracts layered on top, which aren't centrally tracked but follow the same pattern in nearly every U.S. city with a housing plan requirement.

1. Federal Level: HUD's Research Machine

HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) is the primary federal engine for housing research. Its FY2025 budget request:

- Core Research & Technology (R&T) funding requested \$71.5 million for 2025, covering Housing Data Infrastructure, Knowledge Management/Dissemination/Outreach, and Technical Expertise and Innovation.
- The full PD&R appropriation request for “contracts, grants, and necessary expenses of programs of research and studies relating to housing and urban problems,” plus technical assistance, totaled \$145.5 million for FY2025.
- Stated HUD research priorities for that money include identifying effective approaches to increase the supply of affordable housing, including through land and zoning reform — the government paying to study a solution that local governments could simply start doing.

Even HUD's own FY2026 budget request moved to shrink this line: the Research and Technology account was proposed for a \$44 million (32%) reduction relative to FY2025, covering

HUD-administered national surveys, program evaluations, data and information management, and support for program implementation.

That reduction is itself evidence for the “just build it” case: even HUD’s own budget planners concluded a third of the federal housing research budget wasn’t essential.

2. Philanthropic Layer (Runs Parallel to Government Money)

Private foundations pour comparable sums into the same enterprise — money critics argue could instead subsidize land, financing gaps, or construction costs directly:

- The MacArthur Foundation’s “How Housing Matters” initiative used an interdisciplinary research network and a competitive research program that awarded \$17 million to 34 projects, part of a stated \$25 million, five-year research commitment.
- That five-year, \$25 million investment included support for a research network and 42 individual studies, with MacArthur producing ongoing research briefs to summarize findings for policymakers.
- The Urban Land Institute alone received \$850,000 from MacArthur — \$500,000 to build a “Housing Matters” research web portal and \$350,000 for a rental housing conference, designed to host policy papers, infographics, webcasts, and webinars for a broad audience of decision-makers.

Forty-two studies, a standalone web portal, a conference, and a stream of “research briefs” — a substantial and sustained investment in talking about the housing shortage.

3. State & Local Level: The Consultant Study Industry

This is where the pattern repeats most visibly, and where the money is hardest to track in aggregate because it’s spread across thousands of municipalities:

- Nearly every U.S. city and county with a housing plan requirement now commissions a Housing Needs Assessment — typically outsourced to planning consultants — which use American Community Survey data to estimate how many renter and owner households are cost-burdened or severely cost-burdened in a given area.
- Cities routinely issue RFPs for consultants to update these plans on a recurring cycle. Example: the City of Woburn, Massachusetts solicited a consultant in 2025 to update its Housing Production Plan with an updated needs assessment, goals, and implementation strategies aligned with state regulations.
- A consulting sub-industry exists around this cycle — firms like Baker Tilly, US Housing Consultants, Hillmann Consulting, and CommunityScale advertise “housing needs assessments,” “market studies,” and “development opportunity assessments” as recurring, billable services to local housing authorities and municipalities.
- Even a single-city deep dive can run to hundreds of pages: San Diego’s Housing Commission partnered with BAE Urban Economics on a comprehensive study analyzing Low-Income Housing Tax Credit data to identify what drives up affordable housing costs — one of dozens of similar city-by-city studies happening simultaneously nationwide, each redoing overlapping analysis.

The Pattern, Summarized

Level	Example	What It Funds
Federal	HUD PD&R	\$145.5M/yr in research, data, and technical assistance contracts
Philanthropic	MacArthur “How Housing Matters”	\$25M over 5 years — 42 studies, a research network, briefs
Local	City housing needs assessments	Recurring consultant contracts, often required to even apply for state/federal funds

The findings from this research have been remarkably consistent for over a decade: high costs are driven by restrictive zoning, lengthy permitting, limited land, and construction costs — the same conclusion HUD's own research priorities describe: “increase the supply of affordable housing, including through land and zoning reforms.” The diagnosis keeps getting re-confirmed.

4. The Punchline: HUD Isn't Even Acting on the Research It Already Has

If the case for more study were strong, you'd expect the findings to at least get implemented. A Government Accountability Office (GAO) priority-recommendations letter to HUD, released in June 2026, suggests otherwise:

- HUD has not implemented a single one of GAO's priority recommendations since May 2025 — zero of the nine flagged that month, and two more were added in June 2026, widening the backlog further.
- As of June 2026, HUD carries 10 priority recommendations and 101 total open recommendations from GAO across its programs.
- One of the stalled priorities: financing options for manufactured housing — a tool GAO identifies as a potential lever against the affordable housing shortage — remain limited because HUD has not fully implemented changes it already proposed to expand them.
- Another stalled priority: HUD has not comprehensively assessed its own disaster-recovery grant program for fraud risk, despite that program's vulnerability being flagged strongly enough to sit on GAO's High-Risk List.

This is the strongest version of the argument: it isn't just that new research is redundant — HUD is sitting on its own agency's outstanding, government-flagged action items while continuing to fund new studies. The problem was never a lack of findings. It's a lack of follow-through.

For context, GAO reports that federal agencies government-wide implement 77% of recommendations made five years prior, and HUD's overall implementation rate (93%) actually beats that average — the failure is concentrated specifically in the handful of recommendations GAO has flagged as most urgent and consequential, which is exactly where follow-through matters most.

5. "Drill Baby Drill" for Housing: A Decade of Tiny House Code Delays

The following is drawn from “Ten Years Later – A Tiny House Code For Wheels Spins In Limbo,” written by Janet Thome, President of Tiny House Alliance USA.

“On April 22, 2026, the atmosphere inside the International Code Council (ICC) Public Comment Hearings in Connecticut was thick with a familiar, weary hope. Advocates for the tiny house movement arrived armed with over 14,000 signatures and two public comments for Appendix BB Tiny Houses, drafted by the very proponents and architects who first cracked the code door open years prior. The drafting of the public comments also included highly respected structural engineers.”

“The proponents sought a legitimate regulatory path for relocatable tiny houses, otherwise known as tiny houses on wheels or ‘movable tiny houses’—dwellings that offer flexibility and sustainability in an era of housing scarcity. This is a type of home that could be placed as a single family dwelling, or as an ADU, or on leased land in a tiny home community.”

“Despite the historical success and widespread adoption of Appendix Q Tiny Houses, for the third time in ten years, those dreams were systematically dismantled. The proponents successfully overturned the previous disapproval to ensure their voices were heard and they were allowed to present the two public comments they submitted, though once again, it was disapproved.”

“The hearing’s most profound moment featured a witness who represents the very ‘lived experience’ code officials often dismiss as theoretical. A 10-year-old boy stood before the committee to testify; he had been raised entirely within the walls of a tiny home. The reality was palpable: the boy first appeared at an ICC hearing as an infant in his mothers arms that resulted in Appendix Q Tiny houses. He has grown from a baby to a young man in the time it has taken the committee to still fail to define his home in the code. While he ‘stole the show’ with his testimony, it was not enough to break through the barriers that have continued to block tiny houses on wheels as a viable housing type.”

Is a Tiny House on Wheels a Vehicle or a Structure? It Is Both

“The duo nature of tiny houses on wheels must be recognized to progress the industry. The pathway forward must integrate both compliance paths. Tiny houses on wheels need their own classification—not another procedural delay or another decade of regulatory fragmentation that is detrimental to the small manufacturers and owner-builders who form the core of the grassroots tiny house movement. Integration would create a clear compliance pathway, preventing overlapping authority, and misplaced liability—something that cannot be accomplished without acknowledging both Motor Vehicle and HUD preemption.”

“An opponent at the recent PCH hearing stated: ‘So I heard a very nice, very interesting proposal yesterday, which I think the proponents should consider. Let’s create an international tiny house code, and let’s put both the vehicles and the tiny houses in that, but don’t come and put them in the residential code, please.’”

“For years, proponents, engineers, builders, advocates, and homeowners have attempted to bridge that divide through hearings, public comments, code proposals, standards development, and direct participation in the process. What they have encountered instead is a cycle of reclassification, jurisdictional avoidance, scope expansion, and regulatory detours that continue to push legal placement further out of reach for ordinary people seeking smaller, more sustainable housing options in a time of a housing crisis with no end in sight.”

“Humanity can land on the moon, develop self-driving vehicles, automate transportation systems, and invest hundreds of billions into futuristic mobility — yet tiny houses on wheels still struggle to achieve clear and consistent acceptance within many regulatory frameworks.”

6. Build It With Whose Hands? Fund the Trades, Bring Shop Class Back

Even if every zoning and code barrier disappeared tomorrow, “just build it” runs into a second bottleneck: there aren’t enough tradespeople to build it with. This is where research dollars should convert directly into people, not more studies.

- The construction industry needed an estimated 439,000 additional workers in 2025, with roughly 349,000 to 499,000 net new workers needed in 2026 alone just to keep pace with demand, according to industry-tracked estimates from the Associated Builders and Contractors and the Associated General Contractors of America.
- Roughly 40% of the current U.S. construction workforce is expected to retire within the next decade, and only about one in ten construction workers is 24 or younger — a pipeline problem, not a demand problem.
- Federal support for career and technical education (CTE) — the funding stream that pays for high school shop classes, welding programs, and community college trade instructors — runs through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, funded at roughly \$1.4 billion a year nationally. That sounds large next to HUD’s research budget, but it’s spread across all 50 states and every trade, not just construction, and CTE advocates note funding has not kept pace with inflation.
- Perkins dollars can pay for shop equipment, instructor salaries, and work-based learning coordinators — but they cannot pay apprentice wages or cover employer on-the-job training costs, leaving a real gap between “we funded the classroom” and “we funded someone’s first paycheck in the trade.”

Two housing research programs (HUD PD&R + MacArthur’s How Housing Matters) come close to matching one full year of the entire country’s federal shop-class and trades-training budget. That is a lopsided bet on diagnosis over people.

A genuine “Build Baby Build” agenda argues for redirecting a meaningful share of housing research dollars toward: restoring shop class and trades pathways in high schools; expanding apprenticeship stipends so a trainee can afford to take an entry-level trades job instead of a faster-paying unskilled one; and funding regional trade schools at the same scale cities currently fund consultant studies. The bottleneck isn’t a mystery to solve. It’s a workforce to build.

Build BABY Build

We Need Housing NOW.

There are people cost-burdened, doubled up, and sleeping in cars tonight who cannot wait for the next study or the next hearing cycle. Build Baby Build is not just about building physical houses. It is about building homes, opportunity, and character for the people who need them today — and for every generation after them.

In a backyard somewhere, a father is teaching his son how to build a tiny house on wheels. It's slow work. The boy holds the level wrong the first few times. He drives a screw in crooked and has to back it out and try again. But his father doesn't take the drill from his hands. He just shows him, again, and waits. By the end of the summer, the boy knows what a stud is, what a header does, why a house needs to breathe. He knows the weight of a thing he built with his own hands. That knowledge doesn't leave him. It becomes who he is.

That is the whole idea, scaled up. A trade isn't just a paycheck. It's a way of standing in the world knowing you can fix what's broken and build what's needed. It's a fifteen-year-old in a shop class that almost got cut, finally holding a welding torch instead of a phone, finding out she's good at something the whole world still needs. It's a returning veteran, handed a set of keys to a small home built by people who once stood where he's standing now, instead of another cold night and another closed door. It's a factory floor that went quiet a generation ago, waking back up because somebody decided we should still make things, and still teach people how.

It's a school principal somewhere who looked at a shop class and saw more than a class period to fill — who made building tiny houses a real school project, and pointed the finished houses toward veterans instead of a parking lot. The students who built them didn't just learn how to frame a wall or run a wire. They learned what it means to build something for someone else and ask for nothing back. They learned pride in a thing they could point to and say, I made that, with my hands, for someone who served. They learned compassion the way you actually learn it — not from a lesson, but from measuring twice, cutting once, and handing the keys to a veteran who finally has a door of his own to close at night. That's not just a construction project. That's character. That's what it looks like to raise a patriot — not by telling a kid to love their country, but by giving them the chance to build something for the people who defended it.

Build Baby Build means the father in the backyard and the shop teacher and the apprentice program and the factory floor are all the same project. It means a tiny house on a trailer and a starter home on a quarter acre and a whole new block of front porches are all the same project. It means a country doesn't get its middle class handed down to it. It gets built, one trained pair of hands at a time, one finished roof at a time, one kid who finally believes he's capable of something real.

So build the homes. Build the tiny houses. Build the neighborhoods and the factories that supply them. Build the apprenticeships that turn curiosity into a career. Bring back shop class so the next kid doesn't have to wait until he's grown to find out what his hands can do. Build affordable housing, the infrastructure underneath it, the communities around it, and the opportunity inside it. Build character — the kind that only comes from making something real for someone who needs it.

Build the middle class. Build the next generation. Build it — not with another report on why it's hard, but the way it's always actually gotten done: one father, one kid, one backyard, one house at a time. One school project, one veteran, one act of pride passed down to a kid who will remember it the rest of his life.

We are literally turning the tables.

This is how we build up America.

A note on tone: This report — the analysis, framing, and opinions in the sections above — is critical of specific spending choices, timelines, and regulatory outcomes, not of the people who work within the agencies and organizations discussed here. These are institutions doing difficult, often thankless work inside real constraints, and no disrespect is intended toward any of them or the professionals within them. Nor is this report trying to disregard academia or research itself — research has real value, and much of the research cited here is exactly what makes this argument possible. The point is one of balance: that time, money, and people also belong on job sites, in classrooms, and in shop labs — building — and that balance has tipped too far toward studying the problem and not far enough toward solving it.

Sources: HUD FY2025 & FY2026 Congressional Budget Justifications (archives.hud.gov; congress.gov CRS reports R47999, R48567); MacArthur Foundation press releases and program pages (macfound.org); Urban Land Institute (americas.uli.org); municipal RFP records (Woburn, MA); San Diego Housing Commission / BAE Urban Economics cost study (sdhc.org); GAO Priority Open Recommendations letter to HUD, via Legis1 reporting, June 23, 2026; Tiny House Alliance USA code-hearing report, “Ten Years Later – A Tiny House Code For Wheels Spins In Limbo,” April 2026; Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act funding data (ACTE, [Congress.gov](https://congress.gov) CRS R47071, Bipartisan Policy Center); construction workforce shortage estimates (Associated Builders and Contractors, Associated General Contractors of America, via Workyard and industry reporting, 2026).

Janet Thome President
Tiny House Alliance USA
janet@tinyhouseallianceusa.org